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Jacket Vision

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JACKET VISION

BY NICK CARRINGTON '10





Cedarville University attracts athletes from all over the country. For family members of these athletes, distance can make it difficult to watch their student-athlete compete. Fortunately, since 2011, these parents, grandparents, and other relatives have been able to watch sporting events online, thanks to the Cedarville Sports Production Team.

The team is the brainchild of Jim Kragel, Associate Professor of Communications, and comprised entirely of broadcasting and digital media students. Two team members are paid, while others serve as volunteers or work toward class credit. For the last three years, this group has broadcasted more than 60 Cedarville athletic events a season, mainly soccer, basketball, and volleyball, with announcers, replays, and sometimes sideline reporters.

Even on a small budget, the Sports Production Team produces an exceptional livestreaming experience. “We have the highest-quality broadcasts of anyone at our level,” said Kragel. During the 2016–2017 season, the entire livestream has been in high definition for the first time, including replays. They also use four or five more cameras than anyone else in

the Great Midwest Athletic Conference (G-MAC).

Through donor gifts, Cedarville University Athletics has supplied equipment and helped expand the team to support the large broadcast schedule. Originally, the team had three or four members. Now, they have between nine and 11.

Alan Geist '83, Cedarville's Athletic Director, believes livestreaming has been great public relations for Cedarville's athletic teams and foresees increased sponsorships as more organizations and potential donors see the quality of the broadcasts.

However, Geist sees the biggest impact on recruiting. That's because coaches can tell parents they can watch their son or daughter online, even though they can't always attend games in person. “We get a lot of emails from family members,” said Geist. “They are thrilled they can watch their loved one play.”

Other programs in the G-MAC have taken notice. Geist explained that Cedarville is “known within the conference for livestreaming and livestreaming well. We owe a lot of the quality to Jim and his team.”

Kragel emphasized the broadcasts' excellence has more to do with the abilities of his students than the equipment.



In the livestream booth, (L–R) Sports Information Director Mark Womack '82; Associate Professor of Kinesiology Kathy Freese, a former Cedarville women's basketball, softball, and volleyball coach; and Assistant Sports Information Director Jim Clark '75. In the background is Associate Professor of Communications Jim Kragel.

"The students here are just amazing. You get one kid with a bad attitude, and it changes everything. We don't have that."

The experience in live production has also been invaluable to the future careers of students. "Live production is difficult," said Kragel. "Our students are getting better entry-level jobs because they have experience producing live events."

In the fast-paced world of live production, experience makes all the difference. "The leadership skills you learn are so important. You are multitasking like crazy," student producer Kate Hartsock '18 said. Fellow producer Noah Taylor '17 agreed. "We've had to learn to deal with tough, real-world scenarios."

These real-world scenarios include directing the faculty, staff, and alumni that serve as announcers during broadcasts. Even though Taylor and Hartsock are still students, the older announcers respect the producers' subject knowledge. "It doesn't feel like students and faculty," Taylor insisted. "It feels like a colleague relationship."

Not only have team members gained experience that will help them succeed in the future, they have also built a special community that makes the hectic schedule enjoyable. "The

team has a fun reputation," said Hartsock. "We love hanging out with each other."

"There is a lot of laughter and joking on the team," Kragel added. "We have a lot of fun together."

While the partnership between Athletics and the Department of Communication has paid off for both, they hope viewers see more than top-notch athletes competing. Both departments want their collaboration to assist Cedarville in proclaiming Christ. With that in mind, some of the commercials during streaming have highlighted Cedarville University's distinctive culture and mission.

"These broadcasts might be some people's introduction to Cedarville as a Christ-centered institution," said Geist. As relatives get the chance to see their loved one play, they will hopefully also see the One for whom Cedarville athletes compete: Jesus Christ.

Nick Carrington '10 is Assistant Professor of Professional Writing at Cedarville and a blogger for Redleg Nation, "a community for obsessive Cincinnati Reds fans, since 2005."